

FOREST

understories



melbourne forest racers

ISSUE 4 OCTOBER 2006

Trying times at Tarrengower

Persistent wind and rain didn't deter over one hundred competitors turning out for MFR's annual Mount Tarrengower event held on 24 September.

Excellent course setting by Bruce and thorough organising by Nicola made for an

enjoyable day for the many competitors and MFR helpers alike. Thanks to them for all their hard work.

The stand out performance of the day was Milo the dog's successful completion of course 1 and course 6.



Peter Jackson placed 2nd in M45A



Manning the finish control were Bruce & David; Ilka Barr finishing on course 4

MFR NEWS

President's news

In December, we are hosting the Victorian Sprint Distance Championships as a twilight race in Melbourne. Please look out for more details closer to the time.

The committee is currently providing feedback on the draft 2007 orienteering fixtures. A few more multi-day weekends are planned so there should be more good opportunities for camping next year. Please contact one of us if you wish to provide input.

Bruce Arthur



up, and Grace joined sister Jasmine as a Tasmanian champion.

Course setter Greg Hawthorne concentrated his courses on the western side of the map, and for most competitors there was very little overlap between last years national titles and the Tasmanian championships. Thick vegetation along the creeks proved a decisive factor in the men's race, as Ryan Smyth took the commando route in the second leg, avoiding longer, but safer options, only to be beaten by the thick cutting grass and ti-tree vegetation. He was caught by Lee Andrewartha, and was unable to shake him for the rest of the course. The 9th leg, again featuring route choice options through the green, also proved decisive for Liggins, and he was almost two minutes faster than Andrewartha, to set up a winning break that he maintained to the end of the race.

4ths for Bruce & Blair

Congratulations to Bruce and Blair on their fantastic results at the WA champs last weekend.

In an interesting swap of their traditional roles Bruce came 4th in the WA long distance champs on Sunday and Blair came 4th in the WA middle distance champs on Saturday.

Could we be looking at a podium spot for Victoria at the Oz Champs? Stay tuned.



Bruce placed 4th at the WA Long Distance champs

Liggo wins Tassy Champs

by Greg Hawthorne (from OA website)

Twenty years after winning his first Tasmanian title in the fog and rain at Espies Craig, Paul Liggins won his second Tasmanian long distance title in mild, but windy conditions at Littlechilds Creek, scene of last years Australian long distance championships. Grace Elson was the sole competitor in the women's race after Hanny Alston withdrew, but as the old sporting truism goes, you can only beat those who turn

Blair's European 'O'dyssey

Blair Trewin is one of only two people in the world to run a JWOC, WOC and a WMOC. Following is his account of Summer 2007 spent Orienteering in Europe.



My 2006 trip didn't start out being planned as the monster it ended up becoming. For the last two or three years, once it became apparent that I probably wasn't going to be threatening the senior team again, I had had my eyes on the first opportunity to have a go at the World Masters. Something

else that had occupied a significant spot on my 'to do' list for some years was one of the big Scandinavian relays, and if Austria was happening in the first week of July then Finland on the third weekend of June was definitely a goer. I then noticed that WOC was a bit earlier than it has been in recent years, in the first few days of August. Was it possible to be there for all of them? At first I thought it would be a bit of a stretch and that I would possibly have to take one or two weeks of unpaid leave. That was before I saw two relevant conferences advertised, one in Helsinki and one in Switzerland, falling squarely into the gap in between WMOC and WOC – the only way either interfered with orienteering plans was that the Helsinki one clashed with the Swedish 5-Days, but Fin-5 (with an MTBO World Championships thrown in) wasn't a bad substitute. The only thing which didn't go to plan was missing out on tickets to the Australia-Croatia World Cup match.

First stop was Jukola, although the trip there wasn't quite as smooth as would have been ideal – I missed my connection in Bangkok due to a late-arriving flight, got rerouted through Heathrow and ended up arriving in Helsinki 10 hours late. (A five-hour transit in Heathrow, not one of the world's more enjoyable airports even before the events of August, is where one really appreciates having an airline lounge membership). It actually wasn't such a bad thing as it meant arriving in Turku at 9 p.m. instead of 11 a.m. and therefore being able to crash straight away and be more or less on the right timezone.

The team we had in Jukola was billed as the Victorian Nuggets. In our original plans it looked like 6 of the 7 might be genuine Nuggets, but we ended up having only 4 at the start line. The last change occurred a few

hours beforehand, when Chris Naunton didn't come up from an injury. Fortunately, Alistair Landels, reserve for his Swedish club, was on hand and made a more than useful replacement. (He's not quite the orienteer he was in the days when he won a World Cup race, but is still pretty good). Alistair wanted to run last leg, which meant I moved from last to 6th (a drop in distance from 14 to 10km).

Jukola is a huge orienteering event, but most of you knew that already. There are about 1400 men's teams of seven runners each, 850 women's teams of four, a substantial army of spectators, a big screen in the assembly area, and all the other infrastructure one needs to cope with 20,000 people or so. That side of things, whilst completely alien to those whose orienteering experience comes solely from Australia, was vaguely familiar from previous forays to the Swedish 5-Days. What came as a major surprise was how big an event it is in the Finnish sporting year as a whole. Even though orienteering as a whole is a second-tier sport in Finland, Jukola is the one weekend of the year when everyone is paying attention to it. I realized how big it was when I paid a visit to the Finnish Meteorological Institute on the following Monday morning, and people there were discussing the Finnish 1-2-3-4 at morning tea in much the same way as the weekend's football results might be dissected at the same time and place in a Melbourne workplace. Being a real live Jukola runner from a vaguely decent team was enough to make me a minor celebrity for the day.

As for the race itself, our target beforehand was the top 200. The first leg was a big surprise to everybody. The mass start on the first leg, with 1400 or so in it, is always pretty willing, and normally the packs stay together for long enough that 100th place at the end of the first leg is only one or two minutes off the lead. Adrian Jackson started in the 700s on the grid (as we had no previous record) and had climbed to 130th by the first TV control without really noticing it himself, but fell away a bit after that.

'Remarkably, someone was on their own in the lead by halfway, something which is definitely Not Supposed To Happen'

The terrain was definitely technical and spread the field out most effectively.

Once Adrian was in we were hovering fairly close to the magic 200th for much of the night. I picked the next three legs as a good opportunity to get a bit of sleep (always a problem for an all-night relay, although 'night' is a bit of a misnomer, as only leg 2 was genuinely dark, with legs 1 and 3 being gloomy enough to require torches for reading the map at times). Alex

Randall had had an excellent 4th leg, and Vanessa Round a decent 5th. I was able to track her progress (and plan my own warm-up) with the benefit of another Jukola feature – the computer connected to the TV controls which allowed you to download the progress of your own team.

Once out in the forest it didn't feel radically different to a normal orienteering race. I didn't have a sense of being in a pack at any stage, although there were almost always people around (a fair number of them leg 4 and 5 runners, and a scattering of the leading leg 7s, although they were fairly obvious by the speed at which they flew past). It was a reasonably clean race, something of a triumph for me given my previous record in Finland. I didn't feel as if I was making much progress, but was: most of the people with whom I was competing were better runners and worse navigators, and I was going through them whilst they were off course. We picked up 25 places on leg 6 to take us to the verge of the top 200, and then Alistair did the job on the last leg to take us up to 184th. We were the best non-European team this year (and perhaps for a long time, although no-one was quite sure), although not by much because an American team came 204th, with much barracking (for both sides) on Attackpoint in the process.

Plan A for the period between Jukola and WMOC (the World Cup) fell through, so plan B was pressed into action (staying with my sister in Oslo for a few days and doing the Norwegian O-Festival). This event was held on very un-Norwegian terrain on a military training ground near Oslo Airport – sand-dune type contours, heaps of tracks and absolutely no rock. The first surprise was arriving at the venue to be greeted by lines of riot police. Before you start getting ideas about how Norwegian orienteers react after a bad run, it turned out that the military base where the event was also housed a group of Afghan asylum-seekers, who decided to use our event as an opportunity to demonstrate their non-enthusiasm about their impending deportation (obviously the Norwegian government's been getting ideas from us).

'...a group of Afghan asylum-seekers, who decided to use our event as an opportunity to demonstrate their non-enthusiasm about their impending deportation'

Once that was out of the way it was down to the events (two individuals and a relay). Two out of three went well, but the one that didn't was the world ranking day. I didn't expect to be too far off the bottom in a Norwegian elite field, but being stone motherless was a bit of a rude awakening.

Getting to Austria had its moments, featuring the sprint (with full pack) for a 90-second train connection which seems to be an obligatory feature of every European

trip I do (this year it was in Copenhagen), a night spent with a meteorological acquaintance in Munich where we discovered that a Bavarian beer garden is an excellent place to watch a World Cup match from, and 15 minutes standing in the rain at my final destination at Wiener Neustadt trying to wake somebody up to open the door. Still far more interesting than flying... The WMOC week started with two events around Vienna which were more useful as warm-ups than for terrain relevance – one of them was on a dead flat area next to the Danube where the main features were remnant WW2 bomb craters. (A few workers still get killed on German building sites every year by hitting leftover unexploded ordnance from 60-plus years ago). These were followed by a sprint race through the Wiener Neustadt town. I was a little apprehensive about this given my history of injuries in sprint races (and the family history in this part of the world), but it was fine, and quite enjoyable – old European town centres have quite a bit to offer for this sort of racing (with the rabbit-warrens that make up the typical Italian hill town being the best).

WMOC itself involves two qualifiers and a final. For many of the older classes there were five or six qualifying heats with only 14-16 to go through from each, which made the opening days pretty cutthroat, but in M35, always a smaller class, half the field got through and none of us expected to have too much difficulty. The first qualifier started with the sort of epic route-choice leg you see a bit of in central European orienteering - 2.5k, and if you went the way I did (not a great idea), 225m of climbing in the last 900 into the control. That was just about the last time we saw anything like it. I'd expected fairly bland continental terrain with long legs in between small pockets of detail, and was more than pleasantly surprised to encounter plenty of subtle contour detail and bits and pieces of rock, with the final being particularly detailed. As expected all the M35s and W35s got through easily (11th in my case despite a couple of so-so runs), but those in the older age groups had a hard time. Jim Russell, who won his M45 heat on the first day, decided he didn't really want to start last in the final, and took the opportunity to have some fun with a persistent follower, even stopping to walk along a track at one stage (whereupon his companion stopped to walk too).

Finals day was significantly hotter than the qualifiers (as it turned out, it was the first day of a three-week stretch during which lowland Austria and Switzerland barely saw a day under 30, in one of Europe's hottest-ever Julys), and most of the A finals had early afternoon starts, but at least the shade in European forests is deep. Going into the week I hadn't been sure what result to expect, because it was hard to gauge the strength of a field of largely unfamiliar names. (I'd thought that the timing and location might make it a good lead-up race for WOC for some people, but Eric Morris was the only WOC runner in the field). From the evidence of the qualifiers I thought top 20 would be decent, top 10 outstanding and a medal out of reach. I was a little scrappy in the first half and didn't

have a lot of energy at that stage, but didn't make any big errors and had a much better second half. It was my best run of the week but I still just missed the top 20, finishing 22nd, probably a par result. Eddie Wymer got a surprisingly good 5th, the best Australian result of the day, while Eric, who would have been one of the favourites if fit, was distinctly unwell and only managed 19th.

(One very familiar name in the field, just ahead of me, was Austria's Wolfgang Waldhäusl. Although we haven't done a comprehensive check, we suspect that we are the only two people to have run a JWOC, a WOC and a WMOC – something which has only been possible in the last two years as the competitors from the first JWOC turned 35. Heather Monro may go one better in a year or two when she turns 35, as she's done an MTBO WOC as well).

It was just about the biggest WMOC yet, with over 4000 competitors, and was very well-organised – if anything went wrong during the week I didn't notice it. The WMOC song was a bit irritating, but event songs are usually a bit irritating. One sponsor I was a bit puzzled by were the Austrian Defence Force – I'm sure the organizers were happy to get their support, but somebody must have forgotten to tell them that an event where 95% of the competitors weren't Austrian and 100% were over 34 probably wasn't going to supply a lot of potential recruits. (The Finnish Navy had much more fertile ground to till at Jukola).

The next stage was Fin-5 at Joensuu, where the MFR contingent comprised Liggo, Henna (and her parents' car) and myself. The objective, at least for me, was to enjoy myself and see a few good MTBO races on the side, which was why I entered M35 rather than M21E. It was a slightly busier week than I thought because I ended up as sort-of manager for the MTBO team after their original manager pulled out. We didn't have a medal to celebrate this time (and the less said about the relay debacle, where all three of the riders in our A team managed to get themselves disqualified, the better), but Adrian Jackson had two solid top-ten results to reinforce himself as a genuine world-class rider. The terrain was mostly pretty enjoyable – open glacial moraines, sand-dune-like, without much rock except for part of day 3 – and I was reasonably happy with 7th (Liggo was 10th). It's a pity that I've learnt to navigate in Finland five years after I stopped being able to run fast.

We managed to narrowly miss the biggest hailstorm in recorded Finnish history, which dropped 6cm stones about 20km away (all we got was a light show, but we found out what had been going on elsewhere when Henna's family rang to check that the car was still intact). Just like eight years ago, we also got to watch the World Cup final in a Finnish bar in the company of a group of people from the winning country. At least they didn't try to juggle flaming torches this year... I then broke from orienteering for two weeks for the conferences (interspersed with a day trip to Tallinn along with a lot of drunken Finns, catching up with Ben Schulz and Michelle Scott in Zurich, and witnessing the once-in-a-lifetime event of a Swiss train running an

hour late). Both were very interesting, and the Swiss organizers had also thoughtfully arranged a venue next to a lake. In yet another hot week, pretty well all of us were in the water within two minutes of the end of the last session of each day (and quite a few went in during lunch/morning tea/afternoon tea breaks too). No strippers were arranged for either conference dinner. That brought us to the World Championships in Denmark. There was a bit of competition involved in this (where I found out that (a) it is possible to set a course with 6% climb in Denmark and (b) how far I am below genuine world class these days). There were also IOF meetings, mostly pretty non-controversial – the controversial stuff (like the absurd 2007 World Cup qualifying system) tends to get done in the sub-committees.

The real business for us, though, was the spectating. It was the moment when I looked at my watch for the umpteenth time in three minutes, realized that Simone Niggli-Luder had at least twenty seconds' worth of ground to cover and only sixteen seconds to do it in, and started screaming "She's not going to make it! She's not going to make it!". The Tasmanian scrum got more and more exultant, and Julia Allston started crying, and so did I (but it took someone else to notice that), and the sixteen seconds expired with Simone still forty metres from the finish line. Australia had its first world champion. None of us really saw it coming. I'd actually said to someone before the final that I was hoping for Hanny to get a solid top-ten result to get some confidence before the long where I thought her real medal chance was.

'just ahead of me was Austria's Wolfgang Waldhäusl... we are the only two people to have run a JWOC, a WOC and a WMOC – something which has only been possible in the last two years as the competitors from the first JWOC turned 35'

It was an extraordinary day for Australian orienteering. We were very happy and made sure everybody knew about it, even if our singing of the anthem went a bit astray – we got to the first 'Advance Australia Fair' and then noticed we'd got a line and half ahead of the accompanying music. (We also treated an unsuspecting Århus bus to a few rousing rounds of 'Aussie Aussie Aussie'). The rest of the world (with the possible exception of the Swiss) were pretty happy too, with the general consensus being that the result was Good For Orienteering.

Everything else was going to pale into comparison with that unless Hanny managed to win more medals. She didn't, but she got us closer than anyone expected as we finally put a full relay together after several near-

misses in recent years. Solid runs from Jo Allison and Grace Elson saw Hanny go out in ninth, with the top three out of reach but some of the next five possibly within range. We thought she might catch some of them. We didn't think she would catch all of them. The leaders seemed to be doing their best to give the race away as well, as Minna Kauppi almost managed to blow a five-minute lead for Finland on the third-last control, and for a moment a medal seemed possible, but in the end we had to settle for fourth, the fastest leg time and a deficit cut from eleven minutes to five. Naturally the team was ecstatic (although, as someone pointed out, you only celebrate fourths if you've never been in that territory before).

There were disappointments during the week too, as was expected in a team that was significantly depleted by injury and retirement beforehand and illness during (a particularly urgent need is to find a male long distance specialist who is under 30), but there were also other results to be happy with, notably Rob Walter's career-best 24th in the middle, Grace Elson and Anna Sheldon both making two finals in their first WOC, and a great last leg from Troy de Haas in a lost relay cause.

It was a very spectator-friendly WOC (both at the venue and on the internet), with lots of big screens, excellent commentary and GPS tracking. It was all very impressive, but at the same time it was difficult to avoid thinking that there are only a few countries in the world that are capable of putting on a show like this – the budget for the week was not far short of A\$2 million. If the World Championships are ever going to come outside Europe again, either they will be on a lesser scale or a pot of money will have to be found from somewhere (perhaps I should have put OA's entire reserves on Hanny to win the sprint at 16/1 with betsafe.no?). The next three are all in former Communist countries which might alter expectations a bit.

All in all, it was a great trip, as most of them are. I was pretty tired at the end of it all but that didn't worry me, and I seem to have survived the accumulated paperwork (I've finally got on top of most of it a month later) and the 2200 accumulated e-mails. JWOC in Dubbo calls next year, but plans are already being sketched out for 2008...

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